

Leo Strauss:

On Aristophanes Clouds

Aristophanes presents Socrates as saying and doing many laughable things; he makes him a laughingstock. Yet he does the same to all of his characters, at least to all of his important characters, regardless of whether they stand for the new ways or for the old. The old-fashioned is no less laughable, no less unreasonable, than the newfangled. Following this thought to its conclusion, one might say that Aristophanes celebrates everywhere the triumph of unreason or madness.¹ Yet he surely does nothing of this kind in the *Clouds*. While his laughable Lysistrata, for instance, is victorious, his laughable Socrates is defeated: A former disciple burns down Socrates' schoolhouse, and it is only by a lucky or laughable accident that Socrates and his disciples do not perish in the flames. Socrates had been responsible for the victory of Unjust Speech over Just Speech, and he had asserted that "Zeus is not." Surely, making that assertion was a capital crime; what happens to him is too little for someone who has committed a capital crime, but it is the utmost that could befall him in a comedy. One thus becomes inclined to believe that Aristophanes expresses his judgments by the outcome of his plays; he approves of those designs that he presents as successful, whereas he disapproves of those that he presents as failures. Even if we could regard this criterion as established and could therefore be certain that Aristophanes disapproved of Socrates' ways, we could not yet be certain that in his view Socrates deserves his fate on account of his opinions. But is it possible to accept this criterion? Did Aristophanes approve of the revolt of his Peisthetairos against the gods, or of the expulsion by his Chremylos of that sensible woman, Poverty? Are we then reduced to finding the poet's judgments in what he says in his own name in the parabasis? But are these sayings not as much parts of the comedies as the curses of his Kleon?

The action that leads to Socrates' downfall is started not by Socrates but by Strepsiades. In accordance with this the *Clouds* begins with a soliloquy by Strepsiades. Strepsiades moans. All Aristophanean comedies open with moanings or complaints. But in contradistinction to the other comedies, the *Clouds* does not end in gaiety. After having given inarticulate expression to his discomfort, Strepsiades calls on Zeus the King: Whether Zeus is the king will become a question for him before long. He speaks to himself because he has no one to talk to; his son, Pheidippides, to whom he would like to talk, is fast asleep. It is still dark. He yearns for the day, for light—in the literal sense. His servants too are asleep. Strepsiades is willing to follow the majority, but he can not find sleep because he has great worries. He speaks of these worries within the recesses of his house while it is still dark. They are caused by the war, which has put an end to the good old times. The war is of some concern to him. We note in advance that the war is of no concern whatever to Socrates. Even to Strepsiades the war is a minor worry compared with the debts that he has incurred through his son, who is passionately given to horsemanship. The sleepless Strepsiades tries to bring order into his accounts. But the same son who, by spending his life in the dream world of horses and racing, has caused the disorder in his father's accounts, prevents his father from reducing those accounts to order by speaking of horses in his dreams. The son had unintentionally disturbed the sleep of his father. Now the father unintentionally disturbs the sleep of his son. Yet the son, who does not worry about the debts, again falls asleep. Continuing his soliloquy Strepsiades traces his worries to their root, to his marriage. He curses the matchmaker who induced him to marry Pheidippides' mother; he is not aware that he thus indirectly curses his beloved son himself. Strepsiades, the simple and rude rustic who lived well and in easy circumstances in the country, married the fine, spoiled, and lascivious niece of an urban patrician, a woman who demanded too much from him in every respect, inciting him to expenses beyond his habits or means and thus setting the model for their son and even for the servants. Their son—whose very name expresses the coming together of the incompatible ingredients to which he owes his being—has inherited the extravagant tastes of his mother and her line and thus ruined his father. Strepsiades now needs his son's help in order to escape the troubles in which his son has involved him. He awakens his son as gently as he can. But the gentleness is not only due to calculation; he loves his son from his heart, just as his son loves him—which, however, does not mean that there are no limits to the father's and the son's love.

Worrying or thinking for a whole night Strepsiades has discovered—not without divine help—a single and amazing path of salvation. But he is no longer young and nimble enough to take it; Pheidippides must take it. The son swears to him by Dionysos that he will do whatever his father asks him. The son would have preferred Poseidon and the father Demeter; Dionysos is as it were the second choice of either; Dionysos supplies the ground on which they can meet. The father draws his son's attention to a little house close by, the "think-tank" of certain wise souls or ghosts. Strepsiades is not sure of their names; but Pheidippides, who has nothing but contempt for those pale-faced boasters, knows that their chiefs are Socrates and Chairephon. When his father asks him to change his whole way of life, to abandon his horsemanship and to become a companion or pupil of Socrates, he absolutely refuses; he breaks his oath without the slightest hesitation, for by complying with his father's request he would disgrace himself in the eyes of his fellow horsemen. Thereupon Strepsiades threatens to throw him out of his house. Pheidippides—who is sure that his mother's relations will not leave him without horses and surer still that his father will not throw him out of his house—declares that he will not pay any attention to his father. Strepsiades no longer has any choice; he is compelled to try to become Socrates' pupil himself. He makes the attempt only after having prayed to the gods.

Socrates' downfall is brought about by Strepsiades. At the beginning of the play he does not even know Socrates' name, whereas his son, the sophisticated horseman, knows it as a matter of course. The men of the upper class know of Socrates, but they have no use for him; they despise him as a particularly ridiculous sort of pauper. The men of the lower class have no use for him and do not even know of him. Only men who are between the two classes can become interested in Socrates and therefore conceivably bring about his ruin. Differently stated, Socrates' corrupting influence can affect only a small part of the population. Through his marriage Strepsiades is a man between the upper and the lower class. From hearsay he knows, or almost knows, that Socrates belongs to a bunch of wise souls who persuade people that heaven is a stove and men are charcoals, while they teach people for money how one can win arguments regardless of whether one upholds a just or an unjust cause, and especially, which is much more difficult, an unjust cause. It seems that the wise souls transmit the persuasive teaching regarding heaven and man without charge, perhaps because it is useless by itself. Strepsiades understands that teaching literally: According to him, Socrates does not teach that heaven

is *like* a stove and men are *like* charcoals, but that heaven *is* a stove and men *are* charcoals. At any rate, since Socrates teaches such strange things about heaven and man, it is not strange that he should be able to teach one how to defraud one's creditors of the last penny. Strepsiades wishes his son to become Socrates' pupil so that he will learn how to defraud their creditors: He wishes to corrupt his son; his own corruption precedes his acquaintance with Socrates and induces him to seek that acquaintance.

It takes considerable time before Strepsiades meets Socrates. Strepsiades knocks at the door of the "think-tank" with rustic force, thus making a thought miscarry, as he learns from a pupil who comes to the door. When he inquires about the thing that miscarried, the pupil tells him that this may be divulged only to disciples. Yet Strepsiades' mere assertion that he has come in order to be a disciple is sufficient for the pupil to disclose to him this and other secrets. Socrates' secrecy measures seem to be defective. On the other hand, hardly anything that the pupil says to Strepsiades—in contradistinction to what Socrates himself will say to him before long—would ever have caused any serious harm to Socrates. In accordance with this, the pupil's reply to Strepsiades' question regarding the identity of the miscarried thought or affair does not clearly reveal any miscarriage: Could the pupil be less stupid than he appears? ² He replies that Socrates had just asked Chairephon how long a flea's jump is in terms of a flea's feet and that the area covered by a flea's foot was being measured in a most clever manner; did Strepsiades' undelicate knocking prevent the measuring of the distance covered by the flea's jump? Strepsiades' admiration for the feat induces the pupil to tell him of another one. Chairephon had asked Socrates whether in his view gnats hum through their mouths or their behinds: This question is even more subtle than the first, since the answer to it requires knowledge of the intestines of living gnats—i.e., of something that is not only very small and subtle but invisible as well. Strepsiades' admiration increases in proportion: Men who know their way in the intestines of gnats can easily defraud human creditors. The pupil can now afford to tell Strepsiades of a mishap that occurred to Socrates when he was studying the ways and revolutions of the moon—a mishap ridiculous in the eyes of Strepsiades and of most men, but not necessarily in those of Socrates' pupils. Strepsiades is, however, not deterred; perhaps he is even reassured. Perhaps equally ridiculous, but surely more successful, was Socrates' attempt to supply his starving group with a frugal dinner by cleverly executing an act of petty theft while pretending to do geometry. Strepsiades is enthusiastic about this feat.³ It has dawned on

him by now that Socrates is not merely one among the many wise souls who inhabit the "think-tank," but their chief; now Strepsiades can no longer restrain his desire to come face to face with Socrates and successfully urges the pupil to open the door so that he can enter. He is amazed by the sight of the pupils, the victims of an inhuman asceticism—they are not even permitted to breathe fresh air for any length of time. Strepsiades hears about astronomy and geometry; but he, a man of the soil, does not have the slightest interest in astronomy, although the art of defrauding one's creditors mysteriously depends on knowledge of heaven, of the heavenly bodies and their motions. He becomes at once keenly interested in the arts of measuring and mapping the earth or the land, which affect him in his capacity as patriotic citizen: Socrates and his pupils lack that motive in their studies.

Strepsiades has just pronounced a grave warning of the Spartan danger when he becomes aware of a man aloft who proves to be Socrates. For Socrates, Strepsiades and the Spartan danger are equally contemptible because they are both ephemeral. Nevertheless, he deigns to explain his strange position to Strepsiades by saying that he looks at the sun from all sides, which Strepsiades takes to mean that he looks down on the gods. Socrates does not protest. He corrects Strepsiades' impression by indirection, only after he has heard why Strepsiades came. Strepsiades is not shocked by Socrates' apparent contempt for the gods, but merely curious why he does not do this from the earth. Socrates replies that one can not discover the things aloft except by having airy thoughts as distinguished from earthy ones. Strepsiades does not quite follow, but he does not care; he has come with serious business that calls for earthy thinking because it must be transacted on the earth, to which Socrates must now willy-nilly descend. Strepsiades explains to Socrates why he is in need of the art of speaking, without saying anything about his son or his life in general. As far as Socrates knows, Strepsiades is a passionate horseman and may be a man without family; he forms his judgment about Strepsiades—about whether or not he should accept him as a pupil—on the basis of insufficient data. Strepsiades is willing to swear by the gods, as he declares spontaneously, that he will pay for the instruction whatever Socrates demands; he is not in the habit of paying cash, let alone in advance. Strepsiades must have been quite surprised to observe that Socrates does not tell his price; Socrates is interested only in Strepsiades' declaration that he will swear by the gods to pay whatever Socrates demands of him. In the first place, Socrates does not believe in oaths of this kind; if he considered the pecu-

liarity of Strepsiades' case at all, he must be even less willing than usual to believe in oaths of this kind, for Strepsiades has said that he wishes to learn the speech or reasoning that does not pay anything. But above all it is all-important for a would-be pupil of Socrates to be eager to know what the divine things are in truth or, in other words, by which gods a sensible man would conceivably swear. For it goes without saying that Socrates is not an atheist; the gods by whom he swears are the Clouds. Perhaps these goddesses can not be called upon to watch over the payment of debts or to avenge perjury. Strepsiades, perhaps relieved that Socrates has not asked for exorbitant pay or, in fact, for any pay at all—in Strepsiades' present condition any pay would be exorbitant—expresses the utmost desire to converse with the Clouds. Thereupon Socrates solemnly initiates Strepsiades, who apprehends the worst but submits to the procedure, since Socrates assures him that there is no danger and that without the initiation and the ensuing appearance of the Clouds he will never become a clever speaker. Has Socrates abandoned his contempt for Strepsiades as an ephemeral? Or does this contempt live side by side with a zealous concern that his fellow mortals, however unpromising, acquire sound opinions about the gods? Socrates pronounces a solemn prayer to the Lord Air, to Ether, and, above all, to the Ladies Clouds, that the latter should appear to Strepsiades. Compared with this prayer, the one that Strepsiades addressed to the ordinary gods before he knocked at Socrates' door is likely to have been most perfunctory.

The Clouds respond to Socrates' pious call by a song announcing their approach. These virgin goddesses have left their father, Okeanos—i.e., the origin of all gods, if not of all beings—and are on their way toward the land of the virgin goddess Athena, a land most praiseworthy for the beauty-loving and Music piety with which it worships the heavenly gods as well as the nether ones. Socrates is the Prometheus of the *Clouds*: Bringing light to others he has no forethought of himself. The goddesses whom Socrates worships seem to care more for Athens than does their worshiper. Socrates responds to their song piously, but Strepsiades does so ludicrously, so that Socrates must rebuke him for behaving like the mocking comedians. Yet Strepsiades is bewildered rather than frivolous. From the outset he must have expected to witness extraordinary things when coming to Socrates, for he knew in advance that only extraordinary things could save him from his creditors. He was not surprised to learn that he could not become a clever speaker, and thus able to defraud his creditors, unless heaven is a stove and men are charcoals; he was still less surprised that he

could not achieve his end unless he became intimately acquainted with the Clouds, who are goddesses. Yet, to hear this asserted by Socrates is one thing, and to hear and see those goddesses themselves is another. But whatever may be true of Strepsiades, whose credulity is very great because of his nature, his upbringing, and his desperate situation, those listeners or readers of Aristophanes who take the poet at his word when he says that he is not satisfied with making them laugh by all means and at all costs must wonder why acquaintance with the Clouds is indispensable for men who wish to become clever speakers or, in other words, what kind of gods the Clouds are.

Strepsiades needs to be reassured that the voices he has heard belong to goddesses and that the clouds, i.e., things that he has hitherto regarded as mere clouds, are goddesses. Socrates gives him this reassurance by an emphatic assertion and adds that the Clouds favor the indolent with powers such as those of understanding, of speaking cleverly, and of talking marvels or miracles; to some extent he now ascribes to the Clouds the effects that he had previously ascribed to the air. Strepsiades, who himself already feels some of the effect of the Clouds as Socrates has described it, is eager to see the goddesses clearly. We may observe here that what he had occasion to admire (and not merely to marvel at) since he knocked at Socrates' door were speeches, songs, or reports of sights, rather than sights. Even now it is more difficult for him than for Socrates to see the Clouds entering. He is understandably perplexed by the difference between the Clouds that he sees and what he has hitherto thought them to be. Socrates traces Strepsiades' previous error regarding the Clouds to his ignorance of the fact that the Clouds support all kinds of more or less mad sophisticates and high-class swindlers, who in return praise their benefactresses with songs and other Music things. This statement does not perplex Strepsiades, but it perplexes us. After all, Socrates himself is the devotee par excellence of the Clouds: Does Socrates claim to be Music, and is he a boaster? One thing seems to be clear: Aristophanes' Socrates claims that he and men like Aristophanes belong to the same species although, as will appear presently, to different subspecies. Strepsiades is not troubled by this difficulty; he applies Socrates' statement to the poets alone, who themselves acknowledge that for praising the Clouds they receive from them an abundance of the most delicate dishes; Socrates agrees, adding that this reward seems to be fair. As is indicated by Socrates' and his pupil's looks—to say nothing of the pupil's report of last night's dinner—Socrates, in contradistinction to the poets, does not praise the Clouds for the sake of good living. In other

words, the species of favorites of the Clouds consists of a starving and a nonstarving part. What causes Strepsiades the greatest difficulty is understanding what has happened to the clouds so that they look, as the beings around him look, like mortal women; for those beings that have now come to full sight do not look like deathless women (although Socrates says that they are goddesses) or like clouds (although Socrates says that they are clouds); clouds surely are not mortal women, nor do they look like them, but rather like outspread flocks of wool. To put it as bluntly as Strepsiades does, clouds do not have noses; whereas the beings that now surround Strepsiades and Socrates, and that look like mortal women, do have noses. We shall not speculate on the right by which Strepsiades regards noses as clear proofs of femininity. It is more important to realize that to state the difficulty as Strepsiades states it means to solve it, for who has not seen clouds with noses, e.g., clouds that look like beasts with noses? As Socrates explains, the clouds can become everything they wish. They can take every shape they wish; they can imitate everything they see; they reveal the nature of everything they see by taking its shape and hence, in particular, they mock laughable men by exaggerating their shape (i.e., they are in particular the models for comic poets). They put together marvelous shapes that are not seen elsewhere, like the shapes of centaurs. It is the quasi-omnipotence⁴ of the clouds that proves that they are divine. In brief, the Clouds are the goddesses of imitation and therefore the natural teachers of all imitative or likeness-making arts, and hence in particular of the art of speaking. Even Strepsiades is now convinced that the clouds are goddesses and in fact queens of the whole, and he greets them accordingly.

The Clouds in their turn greet Strepsiades and above all Socrates, whom they praise while teasing him; they declare that they favor him more than any other contemporary prattler about the things aloft with the exception of Prodikos. While they favor Prodikos because of his wisdom and judgment, they favor Socrates because of his arrogant deportment in the streets, his asceticism, and the solemn airs he puts on because of his intimacy with the Clouds. (The Socrates of the *Clouds* is then not a mere representative of a type.⁵) They ask him what he desires because they wish to supply him with it, but he is so self-sufficient that he does not even stop to reply. What he wants from the Clouds they have already granted him: Strepsiades has been duly impressed by them. Hence he now proclaims to Strepsiades that the Clouds alone are goddesses, and that everything else is idle talk. The Clouds listen to this proclamation in silence. Strepsiades is understandably surprised: Is Earth not a goddess? Above all,

is the Olympian Zeus not a god? The all-daring Socrates, who came to sight at first as studying but not revering the sun, does not leave any doubt in Strepsiades' mind: Zeus, far from being a god, does not even exist. But this is manifestly absurd: If Zeus does not exist, who makes it rain? The Clouds, of course: Have you ever seen it rain without clouds? What is true of rain is true *mutatis mutandis* of fear-inspiring thunder; thunder is no threat. But the Clouds may be that without which there can be neither rain nor thunder; this does not prove that they are the cause of rain or thunder, or that they are not moved or compelled to rain or to thunder by something else or somebody else—by Zeus. Thus driven to the wall by Strepsiades, who fights valiantly for the life of Zeus, Socrates—who otherwise would have left matters at the divinity of the Clouds alone—admits that there is something higher than the Clouds, but he absolutely denies that the something higher is Zeus; it is the ethereal vortex. Strepsiades has no difficulty in understanding this contention: Zeus, who was hitherto the king, has been dethroned by Vortex, who is now the king, just as Zeus himself once dethroned Kronos; but Strepsiades still wants proof. Socrates supplies him with that proof by illustrating the genesis of thunder with an example taken from Strepsiades himself—from his gastric troubles after overeating on a holiday. The homely example does its work. Strepsiades' understanding has remarkably increased: He does not say that thunder is the same as the sounds accompanying diarrhea, but (cf. also 165) that it is like them. Still, the similarity is great; it deprives the things aloft of all their awesome glamour. Socrates debunks the things aloft (rumor has it that he held heaven to be a stove), perhaps in order to debunk justice. For one apparently overwhelming difficulty remains: Lightning bolts are thought to be the work of Zeus, who strikes perjurers with them. Yet Socrates easily takes away Strepsiades' fear, partly through expressing his utter contempt for the old-fashioned old man who believes such things: More temples and oaks holy to Zeus are struck by lightning than are perjurers. In the case of rain and thunder, Zeus has been replaced by the Clouds and Air; in the case of the punishment of perjury, Zeus has not been replaced by anybody or anything: There is no divine punishment for perjury or for any other crime. Socrates calls Strepsiades old-fashioned: The debunking of things aloft is inseparable from the debunking of antiquity, which clothes them with awe-inspiring splendor. Nothing is left for Strepsiades except to ask Socrates for an explanation of lightning in terms of air and clouds. Once this explanation is given and confirmed by Strepsiades himself, who remembers at the right moment another holiday

experience that he had, he is fit to be addressed by the Clouds. He is promised that he will be blessed and famous, provided he possesses a good memory, is given to thinking, and dedicates himself with the utmost zeal to study by leading a hard life, abstaining from gymnastics, and preferring victory in action, in counsel, and in fighting with the tongue to everything else; sexual abstinence is tacitly included among the requirements. Strepsiades gives us all the assurances one could wish for regarding his frugality, endurance, and continence; his way of life (as distinguished from that of his son) has always been akin to that of Socrates and his pupils. We must wait and see whether his memory and thinking suffice. Socrates concludes the initiation of Strepsiades by asking him no longer to recognize any other gods except those that Socrates and his companions recognize, namely Chaos, the Clouds, and the tongue. The Clouds do not protest. Strepsiades promises that he will not talk to the other gods even if he meets them, or offer sacrifices or any other honoring gifts to them. He could not go further; he does not see the difference between ignoring the gods or denying their kingship or power and denying that they are. Socrates has no opportunity to correct him; for before he can say anything the Clouds, who are perfectly satisfied with Strepsiades' promise, step in with a request addressed to Strepsiades that he tell them confidently what he wants them to do for him: He will obtain what he desires if he honors and admires the Clouds—they do not say if he honors and admires no other gods except the Clouds—and if he attempts to be clever. Strepsiades replies that he does not want more than to be the very best speaker in Greece. The goddesses easily promise him that henceforth he will be among the most successful speakers in the Athenian Assembly. But his ambition does not run so high; he is content to be able to defraud any creditors, Athenian or stranger, however clever. The Clouds grant him that power, if possible, with still greater ease. Strepsiades is intoxicated with joy: In order to become known as the cleverest rogue, he is willing to undergo any hardship, however extreme, if not death itself; he almost forgets the end for the means. After promising him that he will forever lead the most enviable life in their company—they do not stoop to mention that he will have a "reputation for being the cleverest rogue"—the Clouds hand him over to Socrates, who is to start teaching him and thus to test his intelligence. They seem to have forgotten that Strepsiades' success does not depend entirely on his worshiping the Clouds, on his continence, and on his eagerness. In fact, they have merely been silent on the fourth condition, lest he change his mind. They are clever—how else could they teach men to speak cleverly?

Socrates says that the Clouds are the only goddesses (365). He also seems to address Air and Ether as gods (264-65), but he does not call them gods. He demands of Strepsiades that he recognize as gods only Chaos, the Clouds, and the tongue (423-24).⁶ If we understand by "gods" superhuman beings that think, will, and speak, the Clouds are for Socrates the only gods. If we say that only thinking and willing beings can be called superhuman, we must say that according to Socrates the highest (air, ether) is subhuman, and only the Clouds are superhuman. Differently stated, whereas Ether or Air, like Poseidon (85), also originates bad things, the Clouds are responsible only for the greatest benefits to man. One may also say that the Clouds, being the only gods, are admittedly "smoke" (320, 330); whereas the other gods are not admittedly but in fact "smoke." Surely no one can deny that the *Clouds* is the only extant Aristophanean play in which the chorus, consisting of the Clouds, is simply superior to the actors proper. Yet why are the Clouds female gods? Socrates explains their appearing in the shape of mortal women by saying that they have just seen a notoriously effeminate Athenian and hence have become women. Yet, long before they appeared, Socrates knew that they are female (252-53). These divine virgins inspire the poets and other music men. They take the place of the Muses, the virgin daughters of Zeus. Socrates can not recognize the Muses; for if, as he asserts, Zeus does not exist, his daughters can not exist. Zeus is replaced by Vortex, or rather by Air and Ether. The relation of the Clouds to Ether or Air is similar to the relation of the Muses to Zeus: They themselves call Ether their father (569-70). They surely "belong" to the Air.⁷ The Clouds are the natural Muses,⁸ and Socrates is the priest of the natural Muses. If the imitative arts are a kind of wisdom, they must be akin to the *archai*. The Clouds derive immediately from the originating beginnings of all things and at the same time conceal them, for by imitating things they claim to be the things in question; they are by nature deceiving. They reveal the nature of things by concealing it and vice versa, just as rhetoric does. They are the goddesses of imitation: There would be no human art of imitation if there were no natural imitation, if imitation were not rooted in nature. The Clouds are *the* natural imitators⁹ that are aloft or akin to the highest. This is the reason why they are the sole gods for Socrates as a man who teaches rhetoric on the basis of *physiologia*, i.e., who teaches both rhetoric and *physiologia*.

Socrates tries to discern Strepsiades' manner or nature, for he knows that different pupils need different approaches, and he has already seen that he must use novel devices in the case of Strepsiades. He asks Strep-

siades point-blank whether he has a good memory and capacity for learning. This however is not the only or the worst ineptitude that he commits. The most astonishing thing is that he tests Strepsiades after he has initiated him: He has disclosed to him the most shocking innovations regarding the gods before finding out whether Strepsiades is able to live with them. It seems that in Socrates' view excellence of memory and understanding is less urgent than continence and endurance, as well as exposure to his goddesses.¹⁰ We must also not overlook the fact that he tests Strepsiades only after the Clouds have asked him to do so. Left to himself, he might not have thought of it; the Clouds are more aware of the importance of the natural differences among men in regard to memory and intelligence than is Socrates. Strepsiades' answers to Socrates' questions about his memory and intelligence are not encouraging. It appears that his present nature is inadequate for achieving wisdom; he will have to acquire a different nature. Nevertheless, Socrates intends to pose him a question regarding the things aloft; but his response is most silly. Yet, when Socrates asks him what he would do if someone beat him, he gives an answer with which Socrates does not find fault, although it reads like a prophecy of what Strepsiades will do in the case of a pupil of Socrates (1322-23), and even of Socrates himself. But Aristophanes' Socrates has no power of divination, no *daimonion*. Accordingly, he solemnly prepares Strepsiades by a second initiation for going indoors, as it were into a fear-inspiring cave, where Socrates will instruct him in the utmost privacy, without any witnesses. We have been made witnesses to the revelation of holy or unholy mysteries that we would never have expected. But we shall never know what is now going to happen between the master and his new yet old pupil.

While Socrates and Strepsiades have their private meeting, the Clouds address the audience. More precisely, in the whole first section of the parabasis the poet himself addresses the audience, speaking through the leading Cloud in his own name and using the first person. This is another feature peculiar to the *Clouds*. After what we have observed about the nature of the Clouds, we are not altogether surprised that Aristophanes himself should almost appear as a member of the chorus of Clouds, but not as a member of the chorus of Acharnians, knights, birds, and so on. In contradistinction to the Clouds worshiper Socrates, Aristophanes is a Cloud; without knowing it Socrates looks up to Aristophanes. Yet Aristophanes does not speak of himself as a Cloud or as a pupil of the Clouds; he traces his breeding to Dionysos. Like the Clouds and unlike Socrates,

he recognizes the gods recognized by the city. Nor does he claim to be a virgin; he even says that he is no longer a virgin. He rebukes the audience for the bad reception it gave to the *Clouds* at an earlier presentation. He regards this comedy as his wisest and the one that cost him more work than any other; he has composed it with special care for the wise part of the audience. He never raises such a claim for any other of his comedies. He compares the *Clouds* to the chaste virgin Elektra because it is, according to his claim, free from all vulgarity. But we must not forget that the particular decency of the *Clouds* is required by Socratic continence. Eager to receive the prize for the *Clouds* this time, Aristophanes softens his rebuke of the Athenians by reminding them of the good reception they gave to an earlier comedy of his. As Elektra looked for her brother Orestes because his lock of hair showed her that he was alive and near, the *Clouds* looks for wise spectators because there are unmistakable signs that will show Aristophanes that wise spectators are alive and near. He reminds his audience of his excellence as a poet: In contrast to his rivals he always figures out most cleverly novel conceits; he courageously attacked Kleon in the heyday of his strength, while sparing him decently after he was down; he also avoids vulgarity in all other respects; he does not claim here explicitly that he is a teacher of the just things. In the epirrhema the *Clouds* speak for themselves as goddesses. Their concern differs strikingly from that of Aristophanes; they are concerned not with the success of the play but with what we would not hesitate to call greater things. They rebuke the audience, i.e., the city of Athens, for its neglect of them. They benefit the city more than any other god, and yet they do not receive any worship whatever from Athens, a city famous for its piety. They thus tacitly, but only tacitly, explain why Socrates is their favorite: Socrates is the only Athenian who worships the *Clouds* and only the *Clouds*. Among their benefits they mention above all the warnings that they gave through thunder, rain, and lightning—together with sun and moon, or through their influence on sun and moon—before the Athenians foolishly elected Kleon as general, whom they and the other gods hate; they now add a piece of advice as to how the city can get rid of Kleon even now. They almost say that not Zeus but they make rain, thunder, and so on. They continue their theme in the antepirrhema, in which they rebuke the Athenians in the name of the Moon for their neglect of this goddess, likewise a great benefactor of Athens, and yet now in danger at the hands of the other gods as a consequence of the Athenians' carelessness regarding the lunar calendar. It appears that while the *Clouds* form part of the

pantheon and hence know that above all Zeus exists, they have particularly close relations with the Moon and Sun, i.e., with beings that are in a way as important to Socrates as the Clouds themselves. How little the Clouds agree with Socrates regarding the gods they show most clearly in the two strophes that form part of the parabasis and in which these goddesses call on eight gods. They mention five gods by name (Zeus, Ether, Apollon, Athena, and Dionysos) and three not by name (Poseidon, Sun, and Artemis).¹¹ In each strophe the Clouds speak once of a god as "ours"; they call Ether "our father" (in the entrance song they spoke of Okeanos as their father, while saying nothing about the god Ether) and Athena "our goddess." In the first case they speak of themselves as Clouds, and in the second case they speak of themselves as Athenians: They are anxious to be adopted by the city of Athens; they wish to find a residence on earth.¹² This is important for understanding the action of the *Clouds*. For the same reason it is important to observe that when the Clouds have the first opportunity to address the city of Athens, they are completely silent about their relations with Socrates. An equally unqualified silence about Socrates is observed by Aristophanes when he speaks in his own name in the *Clouds*. Let us also note that the only goddesses called upon by the Clouds are virgins, and the only god praised by them for his universal beneficence is Ether.

Socrates and shortly afterward Strepsiades return to the light. Socrates is disgusted by Strepsiades' stupidity. Whatever he may have tried to teach him indoors, he has failed completely. Nevertheless, he is still willing to continue teaching him; but now, outdoors, he will teach him things that he has never been taught before in any way. This gives us an inkling of what Socrates had tried to teach Strepsiades indoors; he had not tried to teach him there any of the things that he is about to teach him now, namely poetics, grammar, and rhetoric. Curiosity or pedantry compels us to note the three more or less trifling changes in the conduct of master and pupil before and after the indoor session, in the hope that the *post hoc* may be a *propter hoc*. Socrates now calls Strepsiades for the first time by his name; Strepsiades now uses lewd language for the first time, at least since he knocked at Socrates' door; the oaths of the two men before and after the *privatissimum* differ remarkably. Socrates' first utterance after his reappearance and before Strepsiades' reappearance is the oath "By Respiration, by the Chaos, by the Air"; the three terms seem to refer to different aspects of one and the same thing, the air.¹³ Shortly afterward (667) Strepsiades swears "by the Air." No one had ever sworn by the

air (or by the ether) before. What air thus gains, the Clouds lose. It is true that no one ever swears "by the Clouds" (perhaps they are too obviously changeable to swear by). However, prior to the indoor session both Socrates and Strepsiades speak of the Clouds as goddesses and address them as goddesses; but after that event, which thus appears to be of decisive importance, Socrates never speaks of them at all, to say nothing of addressing them, and Strepsiades addresses them as "clouds" and no longer as goddesses (793, 1452, 1462). Socrates now swears "by the Graces" (773), whose place the Clouds might seem to have taken in the outdoor teaching preceding the *privatissimum*; and Strepsiades now swears "by the Mist" (814), i.e., by what the Clouds are in truth (330). Prior to his indoor instruction he had called the Clouds "queens of the whole," while afterward he calls Fraud "queen of the whole" (357, 1150). In accordance with this Strepsiades describes Socrates after the indoor meeting as "the Melian" (830). But whatever Socrates may think of the Clouds and may have taught Strepsiades about them, the Clouds have a life of their own, a will of their own: They insist on their being goddesses (804, 1121). It is not as easy to get rid of the spirits that one has conjured up as Socrates thinks. However this may be, in the *Clouds*, and only in the *Clouds*, an important part of the action takes place during the parabasis, while the purport of this action is never reported to the audience: ¹⁴ We are compelled to guess, or to put two and two together. It seems that just as in the parabasis the Clouds were silent as to Socrates, during the parabasis Socrates debunked the Clouds.

The outdoor teaching following the indoor session is to be devoted in the first place to meters, verse, and rhythms. Strepsiades is unable and unwilling to learn about meters and rhythms; he wishes to learn nothing except the Unjust Speech. Socrates explains to him that before he can learn the Unjust Speech he must learn about the correct use of words; the introduction to poetry proper is silently dropped, and thus the final catastrophe is decisively prepared. Strepsiades makes at least an effort to follow Socrates' instruction on the correct use of words—an instruction that is paradoxical yet easy to grasp, although perhaps even in Socrates' view rather useless. Socrates turns next to teaching Strepsiades injustice or, more generally, to teaching him how to think about his own affairs (as distinguished from divine affairs or the affairs aloft mentioned earlier); it seems that this part of the instruction is preparatory, at least in the case of Strepsiades, to exposure to the Unjust Speech itself. In accordance with the severe—not to say pious—requirements of Socratic instruction, Strep-

siades must undergo his training in deliberation while in a position that calls for the utmost endurance; he therefore deliberates about how he can survive his present discomfort, rather than how he can defraud his creditors. Socrates is very patient with him; this master of endurance and continence fails to understand why one can not concentrate, and even sleep, while exposed to a whole army of fleas. After much prodding by Socrates, Strepsiades produces the conceit that he can postpone his payments to his creditors indefinitely by getting hold of the moon with the help of a witch and putting the moon into a box like a mirror. After Strepsiades has enlightened Socrates about the connection, apparently unknown to him, between the lunar calendar and the legal dates of payment of interest, Socrates is satisfied with Strepsiades' conceit—perhaps because Strepsiades has remembered, if dimly, a certain similarity between the moon and the mirror.¹⁵ Yet Socrates is now eager to call Strepsiades down from heaven to earth by reminding him of his need to win lawsuits: Less astronomy (even magic astronomy) and more forensic rhetoric is what you need; you imitate me too much, in the wrong manner; you caricature me [Strepsiades as the pupil of Aristophanes' Socrates is a caricature of a caricature]; for instance, how can you do away with a written charge that you are delinquent in paying an exorbitant sum of money? Strepsiades replies that he would privately burn the text of the accusation by using a burning glass, i.e., the sun. Socrates is highly pleased with this elegant conceit; he is now much more pleased with Strepsiades than ever before. All the more striking is the immediate sequel. Strepsiades' reply, in spite of its excellence, was still too physical and insufficiently rhetorical. Socrates asks him therefore how he would avoid losing a lawsuit if he needed witnesses but had none; i.e., what he would do in a situation in which only a clever tongue and no heavenly body could help. Strepsiades replies that he would run away and hang himself before his case came up in court, for people who are dead can not be sued. Thereupon, contrary to all reasonable expectations and acting with the utmost brutality, Socrates severs his relations with Strepsiades at once. He refuses to continue his instruction on the ground that Strepsiades forgets at once whatever he has learned. In fact, Strepsiades is unable to remember what he had been taught at the beginning of the instruction following the *privatissimum*. But we are left wondering why Strepsiades' proposal that he might get rid of his difficulties by hanging himself proves poor memory or contradicts anything that he has learned from Socrates at any time, and especially at the beginning of the outdoor instruction. Perhaps Strepsiades

learned from Socrates while we were not witnesses to the instruction that suicide must not be chosen under any circumstances, or at least not on account of money or the lack of money. At any rate, what Strepsiades forgot must have been of the utmost importance in Socrates' view if his reaction to Strepsiades' proposal is not to remain a wholly inexplicable act. For the fact that Strepsiades has a poor memory and is stupid was well known to Socrates for quite some time; his realization of these defects had caused him to turn in despair from the indoor instruction to the outdoor instruction. But while he spoke of these defects in the positive when he interrupted the indoor instruction, he speaks of them in the superlative when he interrupts the outdoor instruction and thus terminates the instruction altogether (629, 790).¹⁶

Socrates has expelled Strepsiades from his school. The old man is in despair. Not having learned to speak cleverly, he will be ruined by his creditors; he will be finished. This disaster will, however, have one great advantage. Completely impoverished and discredited and unable to earn a living by blackmailing the pauper Socrates, Strepsiades will leave Socrates alone and Socrates' "think-tank" activity will continue undisturbed. The Socrates-Strepsiades incident will have what one may not unjustly call a happy ending. That incident ends differently because Strepsiades in his despair turns to the Clouds for advice. The Clouds' interest would not have been served if the relations between Socrates and Strepsiades were to have found an altogether unspectacular or unsensational ending in Socrates' ordering Strepsiades off his premises. The advice that the Clouds give to Strepsiades is decisive, at least to the extent that it renders possible a continuation of the Socrates-Strepsiades incident. If hitherto it was Strepsiades who was primarily responsible for that incident, from now on the responsibility rests with the Clouds.

The Clouds advise Strepsiades, in case he has a grown-up son, to send him to Socrates' school to learn in his stead. They inspire him with a firmness toward his son that he hitherto lacked. When Strepsiades has left in order to fetch Pheidippides, the Clouds who, being goddesses, can not have been unaware of Socrates' cooling toward them, remind him that they are the only gods, to whom he owes the greatest benefits. They urge him to take the utmost advantage of Strepsiades' present state of mind quickly, while the opportunity lasts. Strepsiades must now perform the formidable task of compelling Pheidippides to enter Socrates' school, for the young man's tastes, as distinguished from his own, have nothing whatever in common with Socrates'. His last word to Pheidippides before he

left him had been to the effect that he would expel him from the house. When he still finds him in the house, he pretends to execute that threat. Pheidippides thinks that his father has gone mad: Never in his life has he seen him so firm. His amazement and his concern for his father's sanity increase when Strepsiades ridicules him for believing, like a little child who, as such, holds the most old-fashioned views, in the existence of Zeus. He discloses to Pheidippides under the seal of secrecy—Socrates had not taken such a precaution, at least not out-doors—that Zeus has been expelled by Vortex: Socrates and Chairephon say so. The denial of Zeus's kingship must be kept a secret, we may suppose, for otherwise the men in the know can not cheat the others by means of oaths. As we might have expected, Strepsiades does not say a word to his son about the Clouds, and in particular about their divinity. While he says the most revolting things about the gods, he is very indignant when Pheidippides expresses in his old vein his contempt for Socrates and Chairephon—men who, in Strepsiades' view, excel in intelligence and thrift, while Pheidippides is stupid and a wastrel. Strepsiades is of course not oblivious of the fact that Pheidippides and Socrates have something in common (843, 803) that he himself lacks: Pheidippides can learn; he can learn something useful from Socrates. When Pheidippides doubts this, his father tells him that from Socrates he can learn self-knowledge and all other worthwhile things, for instance, the correct use of words. Pheidippides becomes ever more certain that his father is mad. But on observing that his father has returned from Socrates' school without his coat and shoes, he becomes concerned also about what is left of the family fortune and agrees to go to Socrates with his father, although not without uttering a dire warning: He has not yet lost his common power of divination. His father makes it somewhat easier for him to bite into the sour apple by suggesting that he may do more or less what he likes with the money that they will keep or acquire through the art that he is going to learn from Socrates: The squalor and disgrace of the company of Socrates and his like is only a brief interlude between long periods of horsemanship. This prospect does not at all lighten Pheidippides' gloom. Socrates can hardly ever have accepted a more unwilling pupil or one more prejudiced against him. He is too self-sufficient to be at all angered by Pheidippides' rudeness to him; he merely rebukes the silly young man for his bad enunciation. Strepsiades assures Socrates that Pheidippides has a natural fitness for learning the art of speaking; as a small child he already showed great talent for the arts, including the imitative arts: Do teach him now, above everything else, the

Unjust Speech'. Socrates merely replies that Pheidippides will receive his instruction directly from the Just Speech and the Unjust Speech themselves, in the absence of Socrates. Socrates does not teach injustice; he merely exposes his pupils to the exchange between Justice and Injustice. He has no influence on that exchange and hence no responsibility for it. One must listen to the two Speeches (and in fact to all speeches) and can not prescribe to them where they should lead and which of them should be victorious; they have a life of their own, like the Clouds.

Pheidippides receives his instruction from the two Speeches without having undergone a test or an initiation. His listening to the two Speeches is the only instruction he receives that is presented to the audience. He must have had further instruction, for later on he proves to have learned from Socrates some things that he did not learn from the two Speeches; his testing may have preceded his severe indoor instruction. The Clouds preside over the debate of the two Speeches, and thus reveal themselves as more responsible for the debate or more akin to it than Socrates; they call both Speeches their "friends." As they imitate everything, they enjoy everything; they both praise the other gods with pleasure and listen with pleasure to Socrates' rejection of the other gods. They are as irresponsible, as insubstantial, as the clouds. The debate consists of two parts. The first part is entirely spontaneous, i.e., not regulated by the Clouds; the two Speeches hurl at each other almost nothing but insults and provocations. Each of them tries to lay hold on Pheidippides; only when they are about to come to blows do the Clouds feel compelled to intervene. Through their insults the Speeches reveal the character of each of them. The Just Speech is old-fashioned; the Unjust Speech is bold. (Their relation resembles that of Sparta and Athens in Thucydides.) The Just Speech pronounces the just things (as Aristophanes claims to do); accordingly he is indifferent to popular applause (like Socrates and unlike Aristophanes): he insults the audience. The Unjust Speech is popular and appeals to the audience as wise (as Aristophanes did to some extent in his own name in the parabasis); when called shameless, ribald, a pederast, and a parricide by the Just Speech, he accepts these epithets as terms of praise. While the Just Speech is now reduced to beggary in Athens, the Unjust Speech, who was formerly a beggar pretending to be a king in disguise, now thrives in Athens. This being the case, and the two Speeches contending with each other for a prize as comedies do, the Unjust Speech is doomed to win. After calling the contestants to order, the Clouds ask each of them to state the case for the kind of education for which he stands, the ancient

and the novel respectively. Certain of his superiority, the Unjust Speech spontaneously grants precedence to his rival: He will refute the Just Speech on the very basis of the latter's premises, as he had already done before to some extent. For in the single piece of reasoning that occurs in the first half of the debate, the following exchange took place. The Unjust Speech asserted that Right does not even exist (just as Socrates had asserted that Zeus does not even exist); the Just Speech asserted that Right is with the gods (i.e., not with men, especially not with the contemporary Athenians). The Unjust Speech rejoined that Zeus could not have fettered his father with impunity if Right were with the gods; the Just Speech was thus reduced to silence concealed or mitigated by insults. Both Speeches argued on the premise that Zeus exists, and that one must live according to Zeus's will. But whereas the Just Speech implied that men should do what Zeus tells them to do, the Unjust Speech asserted that men should or may do what Zeus does. As a consequence of his defeat, the Just Speech is completely silent about Zeus's or other gods' being the support of Right in the rest of the debate.

In his long discourse the Just Speech, the defender of decency, recalls with nostalgia the olden times when he throve and moderation was respected. Boys were seen and not heard; they were well behaved and bred to continence and endurance; they learned the traditional music and poetry; deviations were severely punished. Love of men for boys was part of the custom, but that love was free from all frivolity and incontinence. When he speaks of the chastity both demanded and practiced in the ancient times, the Just Speech goes into such details as to make one fear that his abhorrence of unchastity is not altogether chaste. That the boys were well trained in gymnastics goes without saying. This kind of education, now ridiculed as old-fashioned, bred the men who fought at Marathon; whereas the kind of education favored by the Unjust Speech breeds effeminates. By choosing the side of the Just Speech, Pheidippides will come to loathe the market place, to be filled with anger when mocked, not to be rude to his parents, especially his father, not to have relations with dancing girls, and above all to respect older men—in a word, to be filled with reverence or sense of shame. Accordingly, the Just Speech speaks here, in the central part of his exposition, much more of what Pheidippides should abstain from or not do than of what he should do, not to say enjoy. In the third and last part of his speech the Just Speech confronts Pheidippides still more clearly with a choice that he will have to make: Will he become a glib busybody or shyster who spends his time in the market

place and at the law courts, thus becoming pale-faced (like Socrates and his companions) and oversexed (unlike Socrates and his companions); or will he become a noble youth who spends his days in the gymnasium, blessed with all signs of a healthy and continent body? The Just Speech does not speak here of health of the soul; in fact, he never mentions the soul—agreeing in this with Socrates, who also never mentions the soul, if for different reasons (he replaces soul by air)—whereas the Unjust Speech does mention it.¹⁷ The Clouds praise the Just Speech for the moderation inherent in his speech; they also praise the bliss of the men of old. Nevertheless—accustomed as they are to assimilate themselves to everything and everyone—they also praise the Unjust Speech and encourage him to try to refute the Just Speech.

The Unjust Speech recommends the new education in the first place by refuting the alternative to it. Whereas the remarks with which he had accompanied or interrupted the Just Speech were spontaneous, the remarks that the Just Speech makes on the occasion of the Unjust Speech are elicited by questions addressed to him by the Unjust Speech: The Unjust Speech is an *elenchos* of the Just Speech; the Unjust Speech argues *ad hominem*. The Unjust Speech is called the Weaker Speech because he undertakes the apparently hopeless task of opposing law and penal justice, i.e., what is generally held to be strongest. He subverts the laws and justice by raising the question regarding their foundations. The Just Speech objected, among other things, to warm baths, on the ground that they make a man cowardly. But that human son of Zeus who was the bravest and bore the greatest toils was admittedly Herakles, and Heraklean baths are warm baths; hence the case against warm baths collapses: Warm baths and a life of toil are compatible. Both the Just Speech and the Unjust Speech start from the premise that the conduct of a son of Zeus like Herakles is a model for ordinary mortals. Secondly, the Just Speech had strongly disapproved of spending one's time in the market place, i.e., of speaking in assemblies; but Homer has presented Nestor and all his other wise men precisely as good at speaking in assemblies. Both Speeches start from the premise that the most ancient poet is the best guide toward virtue, since the good is the old; both Speeches base their assertions on poetry. Lastly, the Just Speech had praised moderation, the opposite of *hybris* on the one hand and of dissoluteness on the other. To dispose first of moderation in the latter sense, it deprives one of the pleasures of love both of boys and women, as well as of the pleasures of gambling, eating, drinking, and laughing—in brief, of everything that makes life worth liv-

ing. As for moderation in the first sense, it ruins life itself. A man can not help committing crimes under the compulsion of nature.¹⁸ He may be caught; he will be hurt and even destroyed if he is unable to defend himself by speech, i.e., to render weak the laws and justice. Only with the help of the Unjust Speech will he be able to justify any crime he commits—especially in the sphere of *eros*—by referring to the example of Zeus: How can a weak mortal be expected to resist *eros* if the all-powerful Zeus is unable to do so? The gods can not reasonably have forbidden men to do what gods and men are by nature compelled to do;¹⁹ let us obey the gods' will, not by doing what they tell us to do (or what they are held to tell us to do), but by doing what they do. Only in the company of the Unjust Speech will Pheidippides be able to enjoy what his nature prompts him to enjoy—to jump, to laugh, to regard nothing as shameful. While the Just Speech upheld the law by being silent on nature, the Unjust Speech appeals from law to nature. The Just Speech has nothing to reply except that by leading a dissolute life Pheidippides will become infamous, but when the Unjust Speech compels him to admit that the most famous orators and tragic poets and even the majority of the audience are infamous, the Just Speech concedes his defeat and deserts to the opposite camp. A way of life that is supported neither by the gods, nor by the orators and tragic poets, nor by the majority is indefensible. Or, to exaggerate considerably for the purpose of clarity, Right, being neither with the gods nor with men, exists only as *logos*, but that *logos* proves to lack *logos*. Yet the Clouds fail to applaud the discourse of the Unjust Speech, while they had applauded that of the Just Speech.

While the debate between the two Speeches that culminates in the complete defeat of the Just Speech is a part of the Socratic instruction, the way of life recommended by the Unjust Speech can not possibly be mistaken for the Socratic way of life; the life of sensual pleasures is wholly alien to Socrates, who is continent in every respect, and in particular in the respect of money, the indispensable condition of reckless dedication to sensual pleasure of any refinement. Contrary to popular rumor he does not teach "for money." He could easily have become rich by demanding money for teaching the art of speaking (876), but he does not have the slightest interest in gain, although his goddesses advise him to take advantage of his pupils; that those of his pupils who are not themselves beggars show him their gratitude by making gifts to him (we do not know whether the gifts are of money) is another matter.²⁰ Socrates' continence reminds us of the recommendations of the Just Speech, but it differs

radically from them because he despises gymnastics and, above all, because he lacks moderation in the deeper sense of the term. He is a man of *hybris* over against the gods and the law; he does not shrink from transgressions like denying the existence of the gods and petty theft. If we may make use of a Xenophontic distinction, he possesses continence, but not that moderation which consists of piety and justice. Like the Unjust Speech, he is characterized by daring and cleverness (wisdom); continence and endurance, as distinguished from moderation, are required for the study of the things aloft. Above all, Socrates' way of life differs from the ways recommended by the two Speeches because the latter are based on the premise, vouched for by the poets, that the gods lead a life of bliss, whereas Socrates holds that the gods do not even exist; even if they did exist, he would not have taken them as his model because of their childishness as shown by their indifference to learning. In the Socratic scheme the debate between the Speeches is only a stage in the ascent toward the right life: The Unjust Speech is, as it were, the self-destruction of justice as supported by the gods. The Socratic way of life is supported neither by the gods, nor by the orators and tragic poets, nor by the majority. (In this respect it agrees with the way of life praised by the Just Speech, as that way of life came to sight under the impact of the attack by the Unjust Speech.) Therefore it is indefensible from the point of view of Aristophanes. Aristophanes pronounces the just things like the Just Speech; he exhorts to a life of sensual pleasure and of laughter like the Unjust Speech.²¹ The two parts of Aristophanes' work are not simply in harmony. Perhaps this is the chief lesson to be drawn from the debate between the two Speeches.

After the triumph of the Unjust Speech Socrates gives Strepsiades an opportunity to reconsider his decision to make Pheidippides a pupil of Socrates, but that triumph merely strengthens Strepsiades' resolve: Pheidippides' instruction must be continued, in particular he must be instructed in "the major affairs." Even prior to the debate Strepsiades had been eager that Pheidippides learn to contradict "all just things," but there is a remarkable difference between favoring all kinds of dishonesty and accepting that surrender to all kinds of sensual pleasures which won out in the debate. Pheidippides, however, is altogether unimpressed by the debate; he loathes Socrates and all his works as much as before, and he again expresses his belief that his father will regret his decision. In beginning his instruction of Pheidippides by exposing him to the debate between the two Speeches, Socrates has failed to put his best foot forward; he has made another blunder. Pheidippides can not have been repelled by the Unjust

Speech's praise of the gay life, but he must have been repelled by his assertion that the gay life is incompatible with those healthy outdoor looks the lack of which was Pheidippides' major objection to the Socratics. In other words, the defeat of the Just Speech is also a defeat of gymnastics, and there is a kinship between gymnastics and horsemanship. On the basis of his experience and that of his comrades, the premise of the debate—that a life of sensual pleasure and a life of upper-class bodily exertion are incompatible—must have appeared to him to be patently wrong and to smell of the "think-tank" rather than of the race track. Going one step further in this direction, we would see the Pheidippides who is not yet converted to Socrates as a living proof that the Aristophanean combination of pronouncing the just things and praising the pleasures of the senses is in accordance with nature.

The indoor instruction of Pheidippides is as much concealed from us as is that of his father. According to Strepsiades' desire, that instruction will also deal with "the major things"; Socrates takes this to mean that Pheidippides is to become an able sophist. The screen concealing Pheidippides' instruction by Socrates himself is the second parabasis. The Clouds reassert their divinity more powerfully than ever. They announce to the audience of mortals the reward that each judge will receive if he awards the prize, as in justice he must, to the chorus of the *Clouds*, as well as the ways in which each will be punished if he does not give the Clouds their honor: Everyone depends for the proper amount and time of rain entirely on the Clouds; the Clouds no longer even allude to any other god. They now speak only in the future tense. They do not remind the audience, as they did in the first parabasis, of past benefits owed to the Clouds, for those benefits had been granted to the city; whereas now the goddesses speak of the rewards (and punishments) in store for the individuals: Individuals are going to vote for or against the *Clouds*. The Clouds exert themselves to the utmost to bring about the success of the *Clouds*, which introduces them for the first time as goddesses to the city of Athens. Their appeal amounts to an attempt to bribe the judges, who are under oath; but this is not simply an unjust act if we grant that it is just for the Athenians to honor the Clouds, and the Clouds by their appeal with teeth in it merely correct an injustice. This, however, implies that in particular ancient Athens, the Athens of Marathon, in which not a single man even dreamed of worshiping the Clouds, was unjust in the highest degree; or that the sympathy between the Clouds and the Unjust Speech, the defender of the new, is necessary or just. The Clouds themselves make clear that they are

wholly powerless in Egypt—in the country of the most ancient antiquity and of excessive piety.

The parabasis must be thought to last as long as Pheidippides' indoor instruction; the time that each of these two simultaneous events takes is measured by units of different length. While Pheidippides was exposed to the hardship of Socratic training and, indeed, because of this exposure, Strepsiades looked forward in a relaxed mood to the day when his payments would become due. Pheidippides' study, at least to the extent to which it is indispensable for Strepsiades' practical purposes, is now completed. The father calls for his son at the "think-tank," making a gift to Socrates and receiving in turn his son, who is now more than sufficiently equipped to perform his filial duty. The good relations between Socrates and Strepsiades are fully restored; in fact, never before were those relations as good as they are now. Strepsiades is exuberant. Pheidippides' very looks show that he has become, as Socrates had promised, a clever sophist. And, what is most surprising, although it does not surprise his father, he is completely free from resentment about the company in which he has had to live and the ordeal he has had to undergo: He is a completely changed man, not only in his looks and skills. By giving his father a specimen of his newly acquired legal reasoning, he relieves him of any apprehension, however small, that might have lingered on. He gives him a sense of complete security due to a sense of superiority to his fellow citizens such as he had never enjoyed before; at least since the day preceding his wedding Strepsiades' spirits had never been so high as they are now. He indulges his *hybris* without any fear. The present scene is the only one in which we see father and son in perfect harmony. They had always loved one another, but hitherto their tastes and interests had always differed widely; by having become perfectly reconciled to Socrates, Pheidippides has become perfectly reconciled with his father. The alleged corruptor of the young has not merely enabled the son to perform his filial duty for the first time in his life; he has established perfect harmony between son and father. May this blessed moment last. It is fittingly the moment when the happy and proud father is going to feast his son.

While the feasting goes on, the first creditor appears and calls for Strepsiades. Strepsiades comes out—his name has been called; he is the debtor, not Pheidippides. But we must also not forget that the superlatively trained Pheidippides must not be disturbed in his feasting or in his resting from the toils of study when Strepsiades' modest training is more than sufficient for handling the situation—we shall use Pheidippides when

we go to court—and Strepsiades can not deny himself the pleasure of getting back at the man who has caused him sleepless nights. Strepsiades' arguing with the creditor can not well be described as legal reasoning. Without any need, from mere *hybris*, he makes public the most terrible things that he has learned in the "think-tank." When the creditor reminds him that he has sworn by the gods to pay his debt to him, Strepsiades laughs at him for his simplicity in believing in oaths by the gods and makes it as clear to him as he can that the men who know have no obligation whatever to the ignorant: For the same reason for which Strepsiades paid what was not legally his debt to Socrates, he does not pay his legal debts to his ignorant creditors. His success in chasing away the first creditor emboldens him to treat a second creditor with still greater insolence than the first. That he deals at all with the second creditor is in itself remarkable since not he, but Pheidippides, is the debtor in this case. Strepsiades, who had originally been wholly indifferent to all studies except those dealing with the earth or the land, now makes the fullest use of his knowledge of heaven and the sea for his earthy ends. We had occasion to observe the formation of this vicious habit during his stay with Socrates. Now he asks his son's creditor whether the water coming down at each rain is always new, or the same water that was previously drawn upward by the sun—in other words, whether the total amount of water ever increases. The creditor does not know and does not care and thus loses, according to Strepsiades' principle, every claim to his money. It seems that his principle, according to which the knowers have no obligation toward the ignorant, arises from the generally accepted principle according to which madmen have lesser rights than the sane. The poor creditor asks Strepsiades to pay at least the interest that is owed to him. Continuing the theme on which he had touched in his question, Strepsiades forces the creditor by a cross-examination that foreshadows the procedure of the Platonic Socrates, to admit that as it would be unjust that the sea increase despite the influx of rivers, it would be still more unjust that money should increase merely by virtue of the flux of time. He chases the second creditor away with still greater insults than the first. The impression that his insolence is increasing is apparently contradicted by the fact that the argument he uses with the first creditor and in which he appeals to the public is blasphemous, whereas the argument he uses with the second creditor and in which he does not appeal to the public is not blasphemous; but whereas in the first argument he merely denies that he owes money and does not explicitly attack the laws, in the second argument he attacks the law that permits the taking of interest.

After witnessing Strepsiades' conduct toward the creditors, the Clouds begin to have dire forebodings regarding the old man, who is as reckless as a lover. One can not but admire their good sense. Strepsiades must have been warned by the Socratics to keep certain things secret from everyone except pupils (104, 824), but this warning certainly was not given with the required force. In addition, every word of caution was rendered nugatory by Socrates' promise that Pheidippides would win every lawsuit even if a thousand witnesses were to testify against him and none for him. Strepsiades was thus led to think that he possessed a protection superior to that afforded by the helmet of Hades. Above all, Socrates' own arrogant deportment toward the ephemerals must have filled Strepsiades with utter contempt for those who had not studied with Socrates; when he addresses the audience as "stones, number, sheep," one can not help suspecting that he uses the master's own words. Using hindsight, we are certain that the reckless old man is bound to ruin Socrates, and that it is high time for the Clouds, after the scene with the creditors, to think of dissociating themselves from Socrates. Yet they do nothing of the kind. They do indeed now disapprove of Strepsiades' dishonesty, or at any rate of its manner or degree, and they predict that on this very day some evil will suddenly befall him. One may say that they announce Strepsiades' speedy punishment, but they do not announce that they will punish him. In accordance with this, they do not know what kind of evil is in store for him, but they have an inkling of its probable source. Strepsiades' principle, according to which those who know have no obligation to the ignorant, permits of the refinement that those who know more have only small obligations to those who know less—a refinement that weakens the obligations of Pheidippides to Strepsiades. The same principle frees the Clouds from all responsibility for Strepsiades' dishonesty that is admittedly based on that principle: However much the Clouds, by encouraging him to become Socrates' pupil, may have encouraged his desire to get rid of his debts by foul means, they did not teach him that principle; and, in addition, they are the knowers par excellence, compared with whom Strepsiades is simply an ignoramus. The Clouds do not expect that Strepsiades will be punished by the law courts for his conduct toward the creditors, for they know as well as Socrates that Pheidippides can defeat anyone with his newly acquired skill. But what is true of Pheidippides is still truer of Socrates: Socrates is beyond the reach of the law. The only one in danger is Strepsiades, and the source of his danger is no other being than his son.

The Clouds have barely pronounced their forebodings when we hear Strepsiades screaming. He is being beaten by his son. The Clouds' cautious

prediction has come true. Strepsiades calls on his kinsmen, rather than on his fellow citizens as such, for help against his son; he as it were returns to his kinsmen from whom he had been alienated by his marriage, by his son, and finally by Socrates. Now he comes to his senses: He asks his son in the presence of witnesses who did not witness the indoor beating whether he beats his father; for indoor beating can as little be proven to a court of law as criminal indoor instruction if the culprit does not confess. Pheidippides impudently admits the deed; the next step of the outraged father will be to accuse his son formally before a court of law (494-96). Yet, if there is any truth in what Socrates and the Clouds asserted and Strepsiades believes as to Pheidippides' forensic competence, Strepsiades will not receive satisfaction by taking that next step. The fact that he prepares it shows how much he has been shaken. His flight to the public has put a stop to the father-beating, and so he can begin to remember that turning to the court is of no use. For the time being he hurls savage insults at his son, which remind us of the insults hurled by the Just Speech at the Unjust Speech, and to which Pheidippides replies with the calm, and in the vein, of the Unjust Speech. Strepsiades, who had remembered his kinsmen for the first time, seems now to remember justice for the first time. Yet with the verbal discharge the worst is over; the evil that had befallen him so suddenly has spent itself. Pheidippides returns to the offensive by declaring that he will prove that he has beaten his father in justice. Strepsiades' hearing of a proof and his forgetting entirely about his beating, even about his present pains, are practically simultaneous: So much of a theoretical man has he become, or at least of an admirer of his son's skill, for which the old man now claims to deserve full credit. By all means he must hear the proof. Pheidippides asks him to choose which of the two Speeches he likes as the basis or the means of the proof. Strepsiades does not understand the question. It is hard to believe that he should have forgotten the two Speeches called the Just Speech and the Unjust Speech. To his outcry "two speeches indeed" Pheidippides replies "the stronger or the weaker," whereupon the father rejoins in effect that one could prove the justice of father-beating of course only on the basis of or by means of the Unjust Speech. Accordingly, Pheidippides' claim that he can prove the justice of father-beating through both Speeches must be dismissed as sheer boasting; certainly Pheidippides drops his offer immediately. Yet we must consider that Pheidippides is cleverer and better trained than his father. Perhaps Pheidippides drops the matter because he sees that his father does not follow him; perhaps the stronger and the weaker speech that he has in

mind are not the Just and the Unjust Speech. In the first place, how could one possibly establish the justice of father-beating on the basis of the Just Speech, given the fact that father-beating everywhere contradicts the law, and the Just Speech regards the law as sacred? Only through the transformation of the Just Speech into the Unjust Speech or the self-destruction of the Just Speech, which is identical with the genesis of the Unjust Speech, could Pheidippides possibly prove his assertion. In other words, if the Just Speech is taken strictly by itself as stating what the gods tell men to do, it can not be used to establish the justice of beating, or fettering, one's father (904-6); in order to establish it, one must make the questionable *metabasis* from "do what the gods tell you to do" to "do what the gods do." Above all, there must be a pair of speeches different from the pair consisting of the Just and Unjust Speeches, for the following reason. The Unjust Speech is the justification of the unqualified surrender to one's own sensual pleasures; it is therefore not the speech justifying the Socratic way of life of extreme continence and endurance. The latter speech finds a partial expression in what we have hitherto called Strepsiades' principle: The man who possesses knowledge has no obligation to the ignorant, but only to the others who know. In other words, the Unjust Speech establishes his recommendations—and therefore in particular the justice of father-beating—on the basis of the stories of the gods or on the basis of the poets whereas, as we shall see, Pheidippides establishes the justice of father-beating by "physical" arguments. "Stronger and weaker speech" may mean both "the Just and the Unjust Speech" and "poetic and physical speech."

The Clouds have undergone a change similar to that which Strepsiades has undergone. These friends of speeches—to say nothing of their calculations—are no longer concerned with the evil that Strepsiades is resolved to do to his creditors, or with the evil that he has suffered at the hands of his son. They are eager to hear the discussion of father-beating or, rather, Strepsiades' rejoinder to Pheidippides' proof; they seem to have a bias in favor of Strepsiades because they are opposed to father-beating, perhaps because these daughters of Okeanos have an old grudge against Zeus's beating of his father. Yet they are not going to help Strepsiades; perhaps they can help (apart from giving or withholding rain) only by giving advice of a nontechnical nature—like the advice to send Pheidippides to Socrates' school. Strepsiades must defeat Pheidippides with the means at his disposal. In the first place, they wish Strepsiades to tell them (rather than the audience) the beginning of the discord between father and son,

for that fight had begun indoors, where neither the goddesses nor the audience could observe it (1354, 1361). We recall that father and son had entered the house in perfect, unheard-of harmony. While they were feasting, Strepsiades tells the Clouds, he asked his son to take the lyre and to sing a certain song of Simonides. Pheidippides straightway refused to follow the old-fashioned habit of singing while drinking; one can not, of course, literally drink and sing at the same time.²² Furthermore, he said that Simonides is a bad poet. At this point Strepsiades began to be angry. Then he asked his son to recite something from Aeschylus; again straightway Pheidippides expressed his loathing for Aeschylus. Strepsiades' anger increased. The disagreement between father and son regarding the old poets naturally led up to the father-beating and to the disagreement regarding father-beating—so close is the connection between veneration for antiquity and deference to old men. Strepsiades could still control his anger, and in order to preserve the hard-won harmony between father and son he went so far as to propose to Pheidippides that he recite something from the more recent poets. Thereupon the spirited Pheidippides recited straightway a passage from Euripides that describes an act of incest between a brother and sister born of the same mother. This was too much for Strepsiades to bear: He hurled insults at his son, the son replied in kind, and finally beat his father. Strepsiades, who had been willing to swallow, not to say propose, the most shameless dishonesties and the most impudent blasphemies, will not stand for incest; a line must be drawn somewhere. Yet, what induced Pheidippides to beat his father was not necessarily any enthusiasm for incest, but merely indignation about Strepsiades' failure to admire Euripides' art. There is nevertheless an obvious connection between incest and father-beating; both crimes destroy the family. However this may be, owing to Pheidippides' action, the issue is now no longer incest, but father-beating. Strepsiades states the case against this crime in powerful terms, for the ludicrous examples that he gives of his paternal care for Pheidippides (there was apparently no maternal care) and of his son's unfilial conduct can easily be translated or retranslated by everyone into the most moving plea or description. The Clouds do not think, however, that the case is settled. They wish to hear Pheidippides' proof of the justice of father-beating, although they realize that if the proof is strong, fathers face a dim prospect; if the Clouds had a bias against father-beating to begin with, they do not have it any more. Strepsiades' report of the indoor dissension may have made them realize the connection between the case for fathers or old men and the case for

antiquity; and they knew all along that the case for antiquity must be defeated, or at least weakened, if the city of Athens is to adopt new divinities.

Pheidippides is thoroughly pleased with the opportunity given to him, first by his father and then by the Clouds, of attacking the old established laws. He looks back with contempt at the time when he was merely an inarticulate horseman. Contrary to our expectation he will never again return to his former way of life, even after he has retrieved the family fortunes; he has lost all taste for horsemanship. His perfect satisfaction with his newly acquired skill and power has not made him oblivious of the fact that it was his very father who, by forcing him to go to Socrates' school, made him the man he now is and therefore enabled him to show that it is just for him to beat his father. Strepsiades, however, who is still licking his wounds, looks back with regret to the happy days when his son was nothing but a horseman and bankrupted him; a healthy body is more important than healthy finances. For the first time he regrets that he ended Pheidippides' former way of life. But he is still very far even from dreaming of turning against Socrates, for, after all, it is still an open question, as the Clouds themselves have made clear, whether father-beating is not just; and if Strepsiades did not know from childhood, he surely learned from Socrates that something may cause one severe bodily pain and yet be good. Pheidippides begins his plea by asking his father whether he beat him while he was a child. Strepsiades replies that he did it out of good will toward him; Pheidippides draws the conclusion that if he beat his father out of good will toward him, he acted justly. He surely always loved his father and still loves him, the love having been strengthened in the meantime by gratitude to him for having compelled him to become a competent speaker. The previous reasoning presupposes indeed that there is equality between father and son; this presupposition is established by the fact that both father and son are equally born free. Yet equality in freedom does not exclude inequality in other respects; fathers are supposed to be superior to their children in wisdom. But if it is wisdom that gives a man the right to beat another, a grown-up son who, by virtue of having completed the Socratic training, is wiser than his father (who was unable to complete that training) may beat his unwise old father. This conclusion obviously contradicts the law as it is in force everywhere. One must then question the law. As Pheidippides takes for granted and Strepsiades does not contest, all law is of human origin; it is the work of a man like you and me, who succeeded in persuading the ancients by speech, i.e., who

did not impose, for instance, the law forbidding father-beating by virtue of a preceding law or authority. Hence nothing prevents Pheidippides, by persuading his contemporaries, from establishing a new law permitting father-beating. This could be understood to mean that both the old law and the new have the same status, that they are both laws merely by virtue of persuasion, agreement, or convention. This, however, is by no means the case: Father-beating is a common practice of cocks and all other beasts, i.e., it is according to nature; for beasts do not have any conventions. Strepsiades objects to this reasoning on the ground that it would compel Pheidippides to imitate cocks also in other respects, for instance, to eat excrement and to sleep on a perch. Pheidippides calmly replies that these things are not of the same kind as father-beating, nor does Socrates think that they are. He does not even stop to show why they differ so profoundly from father-beating: Not all beasts eat excrement and sleep on perches, to say nothing of the fact that Pheidippides had not set up cocks, or other birds, as the models of man in every respect. We may also note that Pheidippides makes a distinction between what is and what Socrates thinks: He does not swear in the words of his teacher. Strepsiades has only one argument left: If I am right, you may beat your son; whereas if you are right, your son will beat you. Pheidippides replies that he may not have a son. (We note that neither Socrates nor anyone else in the "think-tank" seems to have children; the society of the "think-tank" seems to be an all-male society and hence without the prospect of progeny.) Strepsiades is completely refuted. Without knowing it, he had granted the right of father-beating before Pheidippides' return from school, when he had been brought to admit the supreme right of the knowers. Addressing his contemporaries in the audience, he generously admits that his son has proven to his satisfaction that sons justly punish their fathers if the fathers do unjust things; tacitly and even unconsciously he makes a distinction between bestial and human father-beating. Harmony between father and son has been restored. Being beaten by his son has ceased to be an evil for Strepsiades; he admits that it is a good thing if it is properly done. The Clouds' dire foreboding has come to naught if Pheidippides beat his father properly, i.e., for an unjust act. Strepsiades was beaten because he failed to admire Euripides; he now seems to grant that he did wrong in not praising Euripides. His failure to praise Euripides was due to Euripides' failure to condemn incest; he now seems to grant that it is wrong to condemn incest. Does he in fact grant this, or has he merely forgotten this divisive issue that led to the father-beating because of the pain of the beating and

joy over the restored harmony? Or must we assume that by granting the justice of father-beating on the ground advanced by Pheidippides one has already granted the justice of incest?

Pheidippides is not yet satisfied. Something urges him to take a further step. Strepsiades is understandably alarmed. Pheidippides reassures him that what he is going to say will perhaps not be displeasing to his father. Strepsiades is curious to hear it. Pheidippides declares that he will beat his mother too. He expects his father to be pleased by the prospect of this act of perfect retribution. However one may look at it, there was something shocking in what he did to his father, who had suffered all the agonies of the insolvent creditor for the sake of his spendthrift son, and who had then conferred on him the supreme benefit—admittedly surpassing in value all the horses in the world—of the Socratic art. Now, however, she who had been the first cause of all his father's misery will receive her deserved punishment without Strepsiades' having to lift a finger, at the hands of her spoiled darling, the major instrument with which she had tormented her infinitely patient husband. But what seems to be the consummation of filial kindness is nothing but repulsive to Strepsiades. Far from being pleased, he is shocked as he never was before. He who had granted the justice of father-beating absolutely denies the justice of mother-beating. We know the reason for this seeming lack of consistency: The issue of incest, which had led to the father-beating, reasserts itself; if a son can lawfully beat his mother, why should it be unlawful for him to commit incest with his mother? After all, the Weaker Speech (1444-45), by which Pheidippides had established the right of father-beating, viz., the argument taken from the universal practice of the beasts, obviously justifies incest between son and mother as well. No love is lost between Strepsiades and his wife, but incest destroys the basis of what was always dearest to him except when it brought him to the precipice of bankruptcy: his relation to his son as his son and nothing but his son.²³ Pheidippides is much too sophisticated to understand his father's feelings. With his usual promptness he offers to prove the justice of mother-beating by means of the weaker speech. Strepsiades absolutely refuses even to listen to a defense of the most atrocious crime. Having come so close to the precipice, he recoils. Now he senses for the first time the badness of the Socratic training, but he knows that he has no right to blame Socrates, for Socrates did not obtrude his teaching: He himself sought it first for himself and then for his son; he has only himself to blame; he deserved his beating, for it was through him that Pheidippides learned to believe in the justice

of father-beating. Yet the Strepsiades who had been exposed to Socrates and the Clouds is no longer a man who can leave matters at blaming himself. It is perhaps permitted to guess that he has this inaudible dialogue with himself: "Come to think of it—did I seek the Socratic training for Pheidippides? Of course not. The Clouds suggested it." The Clouds, who can not know that he himself had tried to become Socrates' pupil only because his son had refused to become one, throw him back on himself: You have only yourself to blame, your own dishonesty. This is true enough but does not come with the best grace from the Clouds who, knowing well what they did, had given Strepsiades, a doubly ignorant man, the greatest possible encouragement for all his wicked plans, as he reminds them. The Clouds reply to him divinely that it is their custom to encourage the lover of wicked practices until they throw him into misery so that he learns to fear the gods. Strepsiades admits that the Clouds' procedure, though wicked, is just. The Clouds do not protest: Their wickedness is in the service of justice, whereas Strepsiades' wickedness is in the service of injustice, to say nothing of the fact that they act in accordance with their nature by imitating Strepsiades to some extent. They merely tell him that he should never have thought of defrauding his creditors of their money. But is defrauding one's creditors such a monstrous crime? Does one destroy the foundations of the family by defrauding creditors who are not near kinsmen? Are there not many people who fear the gods and yet defraud their creditors? Above all, can a man of some spirit who is about to lose his last penny—for we suppose that Strepsiades has given up all thought of using Pheidippides' art—walk around with the feeling that he has only himself to blame for his disgrace? Think only of the triumph of the creditors whom he has insulted as no creditors ever were insulted, except after successful popular risings. Did the Clouds not say that the only thing that counts is to fear the gods? It is true that Strepsiades was responsible for the plan to defraud the creditors but, by Zeus, the thought of not fearing the gods had never entered his head until Socrates told him that it is ridiculous to fear the gods. What Strepsiades has to blame himself for is nothing compared with Socrates' guilt: Socrates and Chairephon have deceived him regarding the greatest matters; they have brought him and his son—a family of impeccable reputation—to the precipice of the most monstrous crime by committing the most monstrous crime, for who does not see that fear of the gods is the only solid support for the prohibition against incest? Socrates and Chairephon must be destroyed. Without the subtle suggestion of the Clouds, Strepsiades

would have paid his debts and withdrawn into a still greater obscurity than the one from which he came; a suggestion by the same Clouds who advised him to send Pheidippides to Socrates induces him to resolve on the destruction of Socrates.

Strepsiades' return to piety and justice is not a return to legality. He takes the punishment of Socrates into his own hands. He can not be blamed for this, since he is certain that no law can reach this master of forensic rhetoric. Strepsiades takes it for granted that Pheidippides will join him in his punitive action; for he takes it for granted that the words of the Clouds had the same effect on his son that they had on himself, precisely because the Clouds had hitherto not given the slightest sign that they are champions of the fear of the gods. All the terrible things that his son had done and said to him are therefore forgiven; he is again his most beloved; the only culprit is Socrates. But here we see the difference between a man who has felt in his bones what the denial of the ancestral Zeus means and a man who has not felt it or, in other words, the difference between a man whose Socratic instruction was abortive and one whose Socratic instruction was complete. Pheidippides firmly refuses to wrong his teacher. His belief in the nonexistence of Zeus and the other gods is unshakable (he never believed in the divinity of the Clouds). He has nothing but contempt for his father's relapse into the archaic beliefs implying that the alleged first grounds, if not gods, are artifacts; his father had never understood the meaning of the Socratic assertion that Zeus does not even exist: In this crucial case the old man, who understood everything else too literally, failed to understand an assertion literally. Accordingly, Strepsiades no longer listens to Pheidippides. Forsaken by his son he turns to Hermes, asking him to forgive him for his insanity and to counsel him. Since his son refused to join him in his punitive action, he is no longer certain whether he ought not to bring Socrates before a court of law. We do not hear the god's reply, but Strepsiades hears him advising both against legal action (the god probably knew that the law could not reach Socrates) and against his plan to kill Socrates: Strepsiades should burn down the "think-tank." The fairness of this advice may not vouch for its high origin, but it surely agrees with it; Hermes can not be offended by a man who denies his existence. Strepsiades immediately sets out to execute this punishment on Socrates and his companions. To their frightened screams he replies with heavy sarcasm, revealing implicitly that Socrates did not take monetary advantage of Strepsiades; but speaking seriously he tells them that they are getting what they deserve for their *hybris*

against the gods and for impiously inquiring regarding the Moon. Any doubts that we may have had about Strepsiades' hearing Hermes, let alone about Hermes' existence, are dispelled by the god's own appearance. He joins Strepsiades in his punitive action, encouraging Strepsiades and his slave to hit Socrates and his companions hard (yet not to kill them) for many reasons, but above all because they have wronged the gods. Socrates' daring assertion that Zeus does not exist has been refuted *ad oculos*: Even Socrates must have learned to fear the gods, i.e., he too must have fulfilled the alleged purpose of the *Clouds*. Yet they retain their ambiguous posture toward the end; they do not oppose Socrates' punishment, but they also do not partake in it, nor do they applaud it. Their punitive action is reserved for the unjust judges who will not grant the prize to the *Clouds*. Nor do we hear Socrates recant his blasphemies.

The *Clouds* ends with Strepsiades' greatest moment: With the assistance of a god he vindicates the gods in public. On the other hand, all his efforts to get rid of his debts have been in vain, and he has lost his son. However Strepsiades may have balanced his triumph and his defeat against each other, there can be no question that the *Clouds* ends badly for Socrates: The visible sign of his way of life, the "think-tank," has gone up in flames. Unless we assume that Aristophanes is a vulgar worshiper of success (in which case he would not have been proud of his *Clouds*), we can not infer from the unhappy ending of the play that Aristophanes unqualifiedly condemned Socrates. This inference is indeed not refuted by the fact that the man who ruined Socrates is far from being praiseworthy: A just man would never have thought of ruining Socrates because he would not have had any dealings with Socrates, and hence would never have acquired knowledge of Socrates' lack of piety and justice. The fact that Aristophanes does not unqualifiedly condemn Socrates is established by the phenomenon of the *Clouds*; the *Clouds* link Aristophanes to Socrates. Socrates is a favorite of the *Clouds*; Aristophanes is himself a *Cloud*, or at the very least he speaks as the leading *Cloud*. The *Clouds* are, in different ways, Socrates' divinities and Aristophanes' divinities; they are as much Aristophanes' divinities as the lamenting gods are Karkinos' divinities (1261). Aristophanes and Socrates are both, as we may say provisionally, masters of the art of imitation; they belong to the same species, although to different subspecies. The difference between Socrates and Aristophanes explains why the *Clouds* eventually turn against Socrates. Aristophanes' disapproval of Socrates, we suspect, goes as far as, but not further than, the *Clouds*' disapproval of him. The *Clouds* claim indeed to

have played a just, if wicked, game with Socrates from the beginning: They encouraged his wicked doings in order to teach him to fear the gods; they claim, as it were, to act on behalf of the gods. Yet this claim is not supported by any fact. They also claim to be the daughters of Okeanos, the origin of all gods, i.e., to belong to the same family to which all gods belong; but this claim conflicts with their claim to be the daughters of Ether, who, for all we know, can not be a descendant of Okeanos. They obviously wish to enter the rank of the gods. Their guiding objective is to be worshiped by the city of Athens. They do not wish the Athenians to cease to worship the other gods. In this respect they differ radically from Socrates. Nothing that is said or done in the play prevents us from assuming that Aristophanes shares the wish of the Clouds and that he shares to this extent Socrates' dissatisfaction with the established divine worship: The traditional pantheon must be enlarged. However this may be, all the actions of the Clouds must be understood in the light of their guiding objective. Hitherto their only worshiper in Athens is Socrates; hence they favor him and humor him: They do not mind it at all when he says the worst things of the other gods by denying their existence, although they know, or at least never deny, that the other gods exist; in other important respects too they avoid Socrates' extremism. The prospects of their being recognized by the city of Athens are very slight; Socrates has no influence in Athens beyond the small circle of his followers. The first opportunity to spread worship of the Clouds beyond that circle arises with the arrival of Strepsiades, the man between the classes; the Clouds grasp that opportunity with eager hands. If Strepsiades' plan had succeeded, their fame would have spread like his. No one can say whether in that case their ambition would have remained as moderate as they present it. Yet they come to realize that Strepsiades' folly and especially loquacity compromise everything; they must dissociate themselves from his plan. But all their efforts would have been in vain if they had quietly abandoned him; they need a spectacular end of the Strepsiades incident; Strepsiades can be depended on to tell everyone willing to listen who it was who made him truly just and pious and induced him to vindicate the gods: His bankruptcy will be rendered illustrious by the high connection of which he can boast. After Socrates has introduced the new divinities into the city, they desert him when they see how untenable or indefensible he has become, owing to the manner in which the test case has developed. At this time these versatile beings must present themselves as merely serving the worship of the other gods. While the *Clouds* ridi-

cules Socrates, it elevates Socrates' goddesses as much as possible. From the *Clouds*' point of view, the end of the *Clouds* is not unhappy. If there should be a contradiction between some observations made in this paragraph and an earlier observation, one can easily solve it by tracing it to the very being of the *Clouds* which, after all, are self-contradictory beings. Yet for this reason it is advisable to understand Aristophanes' critique of Socrates without reference to the *Clouds*.

The *Clouds*' final action presupposes Strepsiades' dissatisfaction with Socrates. Nothing further needs to be said about Strepsiades' defects. His dissatisfaction with Socrates, however, has a respectable cause; it is due to concern with the family. The family can not be secure and flourish except by being part of the city; the family is compelled, as it were, to expand into the city by the prohibition against incest. This prohibition may owe its reasonableness to the needs of the family (or of the city); it owes its force or sacredness to divine sanctions. Strepsiades had no misgivings about the rejection of divine sanctions for oaths; on the contrary, he welcomed that rejection. Only when he sees that the same thought that liberates him from his creditors legitimates incest does he return to piety and justice. Differently stated, he had always been concerned with the city, but he did not mind transgressing the city's laws when they conflicted with his interests. His Socratic instruction brought him close to looking down on all laws; eventually he is brought to see that whoever breaks any law destroys the city as far as in him lies. Strepsiades' concern with the family is the root of his concern with the city and therefore also with the gods. Socrates, on the other hand, is wholly unconcerned with the city or the family; in this respect he agrees with the Unjust Speech. He is concerned above all with knowledge of the things aloft and, secondarily, with the art of speaking. His concern calls for an association radically different from the family, the association with his fellow students or pupils. They live by themselves; they live together, not only studying together, but also eating together; despising all ephemeral things, practicing continence and endurance to the highest degree, they form a communist society. They know of no obligation to outsiders; they recognize only the rights of those who know.²⁴ Socrates is aware that his small society is in need of support from the outside—a support that it receives through gifts or theft. Being an all-male society, it must replenish itself from the general population, i.e., from men who may already have formed attachments to other ignoramuses.²⁵ It is a society of friends and hence a society without *eros*. Only if Socrates and his pupils stemmed from oaks

and rocks could his experiment be successful. This need of outside support, and not love of gain, induces him to welcome the "ephemeral" Strepsiades in spite of his contempt for all ephemerals. But Socrates has no awareness of his dependence on the city. There is only one argument of the Just Speech that the Unjust Speech does not meet: The Just Speech says to his opponent that the city feeds him. The same accusation can justly be brought against the Aristophanean Socrates, who also does not show the slightest sign of civic responsibility. He has the defect of the pure theoretician;²⁶ he lacks *phronesis*; he has not reflected on the conditions or the context of his own doing: he lacks self-knowledge (cf. 842). Owing to his lack of *phronesis* he can not imitate life properly; he is a-Music.²⁷ This lack of prudence shows itself in his whole management of the Strepsiades incident; this student of nature does not properly consider nature in its practically most important respect: the natural differences among men. He succeeds indeed in impressing Strepsiades with the Cloud worship; he would never have succeeded in becoming a public priest (359) of the Clouds. Thanks to his mastery of the art of speaking, he is indeed beyond the reach of the law, or the law qua speech is at his mercy. Nothing is sacred for him because nothing can withstand his *logos*; but he forgets the power of that *alogon* which is the basis of the family and hence of the city; he forgets the fact that he is at the mercy of force, of superior force, or that force is the *ultima ratio*, the ultimate *logos* of the city. For the very fact of the superiority of the city in regard to force, as well as the ground of this superiority—the fact that most men are above all members of their families and not of the community of knowers—can be stated by speech. That speech may be said to be the Just Speech par excellence. The Just Speech that is a character in the play is justly defeated by the Unjust Speech: The true Just Speech is the *Clouds*. The former Just Speech is based on ancestral opinions; the true Just Speech is based on knowledge of the nature of man. The true Just Speech, too, is not effective without the use of human force, but it sets that force in motion—Socrates' doctrine destroys not the city but only his "think-tank," or at most Socrates himself. He is the plaything of things—"the Clouds"—that he has in a way created but that he does not comprehend.

Socrates' downfall would have been avoided if Pheidippides had been satisfied with proving to his father the justice of father-beating and had not gone on to assert the justice of mother-beating; in other words, if he had behaved with ordinary prudence; but such prudence as he originally possessed had been expelled by the Socratic training. Yet, since the ways

of imprudence or madness are infinite, his conduct is in need of further exploration. Originally he had a powerful prejudice against Socrates, and this prejudice had not been weakened, to say the least, by the debate between the two Speeches. The complete change that he underwent—his conversion by Socrates to Socrates—took place only during the indoor instruction. Hence we do not know the precise cause of his change. We do not know precisely the reasons used by Socrates against his previous notions. These reasons were not identical with those used by Socrates against Strepsiades' previous notions (cf. 478–80). For instance, Pheidippides shows no signs of ever having been initiated into the worship of the Clouds or the belief in their divinity. He merely was liberated by Socrates from belief in the gods and from respect for the law; his instruction in this respect must have been more thorough than his father's: His father did not learn that such things as father-beating and incest are by nature just. Pheidippides learned from Socrates that what he expected to achieve through horsemanship could be achieved much better by the art of speaking. Socrates treated Pheidippides differently than Strepsiades not only because Pheidippides had a better mind than his father. There is a kinship between Socrates and Strepsiades with regard to continence and endurance. There is a kinship in an entirely different respect between Socrates and Pheidippides: Pheidippides has ruined the family fortune by his dedication to horsemanship, and Socrates is a pauper for the sake of his study of the things aloft. Yet the most powerful or the most appropriate reasons would have had no effect on Pheidippides if Socrates had not first succeeded in overcoming Pheidippides' profound loathing of him by his bewitching power or charm—a charm great enough to disgust Pheidippides for the rest of his days with horsemanship and to convert him into a dedicated lover of speeches. Socrates' conversion of Pheidippides is a very great victory. This victory is concealed from the laughs by Socrates' final defeat. Once one has noticed the victory, one must wonder whether the victory or the defeat is greater; for since we do not worship "success," we must consider the implications of the fact that Pheidippides has a better nature than Strepsiades.

By failing to present to the public Pheidippides' indoor instruction, Aristophanes has failed to present to us Socrates' charm. He could not show it without ruining his comedy as comedy. He could show Socrates' charm only by its effect, as Homer showed Helen's beauty. This means that in order to understand an Aristophanean comedy, one must, considering the essence or the limitation of the comedy, transcend that limitation.

We remember how Plato presents Socrates' continence and endurance in the *Banquet*. The Aristophanean equivalent consists in presenting Socrates as ignorant of the fact that human beings can not concentrate or sleep while exposed to innumerable fleas. Aristophanes means exactly the same phenomenon as Plato. Just as one must enlarge the Platonic presentation of Socratic continence by adding to the immunity to wine and to Alkibiades' youthful bloom the immunity to fleabites, one must enlarge the Aristophanean presentation of the same subject by supplementing it with parallels of a higher order. One must transform the specific two-dimensionality of his comedy into a transcomic three-dimensionality. Transcomic does not mean tragic. The sequence of incidents in an Aristophanean comedy appears at first glance as a series of most laughable somersaults of different kinds; this is part of what I mean by its specific two-dimensionality. By thinking about each incident and the sequence of incidents one transcends that two-dimensionality. One may call the flea example the comic equivalent of Socrates' high-class continence and endurance. Of most things there are comic equivalents. Of Socrates' charm there is no comic equivalent; hence Aristophanes can not present that charm. What makes Socrates a comical subject is, on the lowest level, the fact that by his looks, his deportment, and his way of life he differs strikingly from everyone else without these differences being manifest, i.e., generally recognized, superiorities on his part; more specifically, Socrates is a comic subject because of his lack of prudence, which renders possible the Strepsiades incident. There is a story of Hegel's preferring the company of a particularly stupid man to that of others; this preference was wittily explained as due to Hegel's not understanding that man. Surely Socrates does not understand Strepsiades or see him as he is. The relation between Socrates and Strepsiades may provisionally be said to be the comic equivalent of many relations presented by Plato and Xenophon. It should be noted that Aristophanes avoids presenting any exchange between Socrates and his pupils proper; the relations within the school are not so comical as to be presentable in an Aristophanean comedy. This alone suffices to explain why he presents a large part of Socrates' instruction of Strepsiades but no part of his instruction of Pheidippides. The essence or limitation of the Aristophanean comedy may also be the reason why Pheidippides is not allowed to speak of incest between son and mother: Father-beating may be laughable, but there are crimes that are not. But there is no crime that must not be considered by him who intends to say the just things. Just as Thucydides has bound himself to the law that he remain as nearly

as possible a writer of a military chronicle ("In the same summer the people of X under the generalship of Y. . ."), Aristophanes is bound to the law that he remain as nearly as possible a writer and producer of a farce that is rich in novel conceits and satisfies an unusually quick-witted and exacting crowd.

To return to Pheidippides, what is it that urges him on to behave as he does in his conversation with his father during the feast and afterward? He has always loved his father, but that love conflicted with the inclinations he had inherited from his mother's side. Socrates freed him from these inclinations; Socrates caused the removal of every impediment to his love for his father. This is an entirely new experience for both the father and the son. Then the son realizes that the harmony between himself and his father is not complete; he wishes to make it complete. Freed from the last traces of the old-fashioned notion of filial deference, he sees himself who is wise as simply superior to his father who is not wise; he treats him as a child whom he tries to raise to his own level; he tries to transform the father-son relation into the relation of fellow knowers or into genuine friendship. Yet he is more attached to his father than to Socrates, just as his father is more attached to him than to Socrates. His father's stubbornness puts a sudden stop to his effort. He does not join him in the action against Socrates, for he has no reason whatever to be displeased with Socrates: He is captivated by the possibilities that Socrates has opened up for him. On the other hand, he does not think of coming to Socrates' aid; his attachment to Socrates does not go that far. He is not a follower of Socrates; he has not been converted by Socrates to the Socratic ways of extreme continence and endurance. He has learned from Socrates that what he believed to achieve by horsemanship can be achieved much better by the art of speaking: He has not learned to replace his end by the Socratic end. He has been converted by Socrates' charms only to the way of life recommended by the Unjust Speech. His eventual conduct toward Socrates—his neither hurting nor helping Socrates—resembles that of the Clouds and, to a higher degree, that of Aristophanes. Is he a comic equivalent of Aristophanes who, perhaps also charmed or instructed by Socrates himself, also accepts only a part of the Socratic teaching?

This question can not be dismissed on the ground that one can say with almost equal right that Pheidippides is the comic equivalent of Oidipous. The answer to our question depends decisively on whether Aristophanes can be presumed to have agreed with his Socrates regarding the gods. The fact that his Strepsiades is presented by him as not understanding the

meaning of Socrates' assertion according to which Zeus does not even exist, and hence as not facing the question to which Socrates' assertion is an answer, proves that Aristophanes himself had faced it. This question is not raised in any other Aristophanean comedy with the clarity with which it is raised in the *Clouds*: The *Clouds* is Aristophanes' "wisest" comedy. In other words, no Aristophanean character is comparable to his Socrates in the decisive respect. On the other hand, all his other comedies take up at least some of the subjects that in the *Clouds* are manifestly linked to the question regarding the gods, viz., family and city, pleasure and justice, nature and convention, the ancient and the novel, the Muses, and father-beating. We must turn to the other comedies in order to see whether they supply severally or jointly the answer to the question that is not clearly answered in the *Clouds*.

Notes

The Clouds

1. Heine, *Werke*, ed. Elster, V, 283–84. Cf. Friedrich Schlegel, *Wissenschaft der europäischen Literatur*, ed. Ernst Behler, pp. 88 ff., and Hegel, *Aesthetik* (*Werke*, ed. Glockner, XIV, 560–61).
2. In the conversation between Strepsiades and the pupil prior to Strepsiades' becoming aware of Socrates, nine subjects of inquiry are mentioned, five of them in reply to Strepsiades' questions.
3. Only the last feat serves a practical purpose; two of the three other feats are originated by Socrates and both are failures, through the actions of Strepsiades and of the lizard respectively: The lizard made Socrates the astronomer ridiculous, while Strepsiades will make Socrates the rhetorician ridiculous and not only ridiculous.
4. Cf. Plato *Republic* 596^b12–e3; *Sophist* 233^e5–234^a6.
5. The context suggests that compared with Socrates Prodikos is rather effeminate; cf. Plato *Protagoras* 315^d4–6.
6. Cf. the triad mentioned in 419 with Xenophon *Memorabilia* I 1.19.
7. The Muses go abroad veiled in thick air: Hesiod *Theogony* 9.
8. Plato *Ion* 534 reads as if the Muses were the only gods, if not the only god.
9. Cf. Plato *Republic* 510^a1–3, 516^a6–7.
10. Xenophon *Memorabilia* IV 3.1–2 and 5.1–2.
11. Cf. Plato *Laws* 945^e.
12. Only in the antistrophe are the localities mentioned of the gods there spoken of; it would have been hard to ascribe a locality of this kind to Ether, who is spoken of in the strophe.
13. Cf. Diogenes of Apollonia B 4–5 (Diels-Kranz, 7th ed.); Aristotle *De anima* 404^a9–10.
14. Contrast this with what the poet does in the *Knights*: The important action in the Council, which takes place during the parabasis, is duly reported immediately after the parabasis (614, 624 ff.).
15. Empedocles B 43.
16. That Strepsiades' memory is not as bad as it appears when he is under the strain of his threatened expulsion from Socrates' school appears from a comparison of 787–89 with 1248–58.

18. Cf. Thucydides III 45.
19. Thucydides V 105.2.
20. Proceeding differently than Burnet and A. E. Taylor, I have come to agree with part of their view of the Aristophanean Socrates. My disagreement with them has two different, although not unrelated, reasons. Burnet and Taylor are concerned with the *Clouds* as a source rather than with understanding the play by itself. Above all, their position is what for want of a more convenient term may be called harmonistic. On the historical level that tendency shows itself in Taylor's assertion that the Aristophanean Socrates is both a physiologist along the lines of Diogenes of Apollonia for instance and a thinker concerned with the royal or political art in the sense of Plato (or Xenophon); he does not pay proper attention to the assertion of Plato's *Laws* X, according to which failure to grasp the radical difference between soul and, say, air leads to contempt of the political (or royal) art. Burnet and Taylor are unable even to consider the possibility that the Platonic (or Xenophontic) Socrates is to some extent a reaction or response to the Aristophanean Socrates. To state my criticism of Burnet more simply, one of his two canons for the interpretation of comedy is based on the premise that "statements of facts are not funny" (*Greek Philosophy* sect. 113)—a premise that would be true only if there were never any funny facts.
21. Both Aristophanes and the Unjust Speech, as distinguished from Socrates and the Just Speech, swear by Dionysos. The only other character in the *Clouds* who swears by Dionysos is Pheidippides.
22. Plato *Laws* 671^a6-7.
23. Sophocles *Oedipus Rex* 1361, 1403-7.
24. Consider Plato *Clitopho* 410^a7-^b1 and *Protagoras* 337^c7-^d4.
25. There are no women in the *Clouds* except such as can not be embraced (257).
26. Cf. Plato *Theaetetus* 173^a6-174^b6.
27. Cf. *Birds* 1491-95, Cf. Plato *Phaedo* 60^c9-61^b7.